

UEC granted certificate for Boardman transmission line

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla Electric Cooperative has been granted a key piece of support in its efforts to build a transmission line in Boardman that has drawn opposition from some property owners.

The Public Utility Commission granted UEC a certificate of public convenience and necessity on March 5. The certificate states that the 230 kilovolt overhead line, which would stretch 4.3 miles from a planned switchyard near Highway 730 to a planned substation on Olson Road near a future Amazon data center, meets the legal criteria for a “necessity for public convenience.” If



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Umatilla Electric Cooperative of Hermiston has received a \$3 million federal loan to finance major energy efficiency upgrades.

UEC isn’t able to convince all property owners involved to voluntarily sign an agreement for an easement, it can use the certificate as evidence in an eminent domain case to compel the property

owners to cooperate.

In June 2020, the *East Oregonian* reported that four of the 11 landowners in question had yet to sign agreements with UEC for an easement across their prop-

erty. On Friday, March 12, Umatilla Electric Cooperative CEO Robert Echenrode said there was one property owner left who had yet to accept a proposal from UEC. If the cooperative isn’t able to convince the landowner to voluntarily sign an agreement, eminent domain may be an option for UEC.

“That’s certainly not a goal of Umatilla Electric,” Echenrode said.

He said the 16-page order from the Public Utility Commission “speaks for itself” on the importance of the line. According to the order, UEC stated that the line was needed to handle current and future growth in the area, and that the cooperative examined three routes and deter-

mined that the planned route is “justified by the comparative cost, benefit to its system and is the least impactful in terms of property, environmental and agricultural considerations.”

Some affected property owners disagreed. Several of them told the *East Oregonian* last year that a large, high-voltage transmission line running through their property would lower its value, cause a nuisance for them and in some cases interfere with their plans for construction on their property. They argued the line was mostly to benefit a single customer’s data centers rather than the community at large.

The order from the Public

Utility Commission details testimony against the plan from the Frederickson and Tallman families, who argued that UEC should go with a route that affects industrial land more than farmland.

The commission sided with UEC, however, and granted the certificate.

Echenrode said besides securing the final private property easement needed — either through an agreement signed with the landowner or through eminent domain proceedings — the UEC needs to secure various permits, including ones needed from Bonneville Power Administration to cross their lines, one to cross Interstate 84 and one from the Bureau of Reclamation to cross a canal.

Bird Scooters come to Hermiston



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A group of four Bird e-scooters sits parked along East Main Street in Hermiston on Wednesday, March 10, 2021. The scooters were recently introduced to Hermiston and can be located and rented by using the Bird Scooters app.

Free workshop on ‘angel investing’ offered

By PHIL WRIGHT
LA GRANDE OBSERVER

An area nonprofit is looking to find some wings to help entrepreneurial enterprises get off the ground in Eastern Oregon.

Eastern Oregon Ventures has teamed up with Oregon Technology Business Center in Beaverton to host a free virtual workshop on angel investing. Wilson Zehr, business faculty at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, owns and operates EO, which has funded the activities of the EOU Entrepreneurship Club and Pub Talk. Angel investing, he said, is another way to support the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

“The majority of the research shows that it is difficult for new ventures to thrive in isolation,” Zehr said. “We need investors, entrepreneurs, advisers, skilled employees, service providers, heroes and a number of other elements.”

Oregon Technology Business Center has been offering a successful program like this in Beaverton for many years, Zehr said, and it is similar to success-



Zehr

ful programs the Oregon Entrepreneurs Network offers in Portland and the Economic Development for Central Oregon.

“Eastern Oregon is one of the few parts of Oregon that doesn’t have access to a program like this,” he said.

The March 25 workshop will kick off this process in Eastern Oregon.

“This will help us gauge the interest of non-institutional investors in the region,” Zehr said. If we can pull together a group that is interested in supporting this activity, then we will start recruiting entrepreneurs. It can be a little bit of a chicken and egg type scenario, but this is how we are trying to address that.”

The program is informational in nature, according to a news release, but the ultimate goal is to help raise an angel fund to invest in early-stage Eastern Oregon business ventures.

Zehr said the state of Oregon

also has expressed an interest in chipping in. He also said there is no pre-set minimum funding goal.

OTBC works with a fund that is \$25,000-\$30,000 per year, he said, while Oregon Entrepreneurs Network’s Angel Oregon is back again this year after a three-year break with a fund of \$125,000.

“This is just meant to be a starting point for EO. As the activity became more popular, we would expect the size of the fund to grow,” Zehr said. “The initial contribution from the state should be \$5,000. This has the potential to grow over time, if the effort is successful. Of course, if the activity is successful over time, the expectation is that state funds would not be required at all.”

Angel funds typically target traded sector startups with the potential for scale, he said, and investors in the fund control the investment decision.

“It will be self-directed,” Zehr said. “We just provide administrative services and direction.”

To register for the workshop, visit <https://bit.ly/3b8G0qB>.

Free COVID-19 testing coming to Umatilla County thanks to the University of Oregon’s RADx-Up team.



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UMATILLA HIGH SCHOOL: 10 A.M. - 1 P.M.

ATKINSON STAFFING: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M.

Every First & Third Saturday

March 6	March 19
April 3	April 17
May 1	May 15
June 5	June 19
July 3	July 17
August 7	August 21

UMATILLA ELECTRIC: 10 A.M. - 1 P.M.

HERMISTON OFFICE

STANFIELD ELEMENTARY: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M.

Every Second & Fourth Saturday

March 13	March 27
April 10	April 24
May 8	May 22
June 12	June 26
July 10	July 24
August 14	August 28

Umatilla Electric Boardman Office: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M. Every Second and Fourth Friday